

Seminar Summary

Moving the needle #18

Rivers as Pathways

Knowledge Product

Asian Dialogue on Sustainability in the
Textile and Garment Industry Series

April 2024



Seminar summary

Fashion is responsible for up to one-fifth of industrial water pollution, due in part to weak regulation and enforcement in producer countries, where rivers are commonly used as a dumping ground for chemical wastewater and textiles.

Discussion topics:

- Rivers as pathways – the role of rivers in human mobility, trade, and cultural exchange.
- Environmental & societal Impacts – how climate change and development affect ecosystems and livelihoods.
- Governance & policy – cross-border cooperation and inclusive water management.
- Future action – research and collaboration for sustainable river management.

Speakers

ZDHC Foundation: Teja Edvankar, technical manager.

Everwave GmbH: Jacqueline Plaster, regional manager Southeast Asia.

REMADE IN CAMBODIA: Jamie Raine, director of business development.

Seminar key takeaways

- **Hazardous chemical discharges:** The textile industry is a significant contributor to chemical pollution, impacting waterways and ecosystems. The ZDHC Foundation aims to eliminate hazardous chemicals through strategic initiatives such as the Manufacturing Restricted Substance List (MRSL) and enhanced wastewater management.
- **Microplastic and waste pollution:** Everwave highlighted the accumulation of waste in rivers and canals, with Cambodia and Thailand as focal points. The organisation uses AI technology and garbage collection boats to clean waterways and collaborates with local recyclers to manage waste sustainably.
- **Innovative fashion initiatives:** Remade in Cambodia demonstrated how upcycled materials from river waste could be transformed into fashion products, promoting a circular economy and supporting local designers.

Proposed solutions

- **Stronger chemical management:** Implement comprehensive guidelines for chemical usage in textile manufacturing, including robust testing and certification processes.
- **Wastewater treatment upgrades:** Enhance effluent treatment plant (ETP) efficiency and adopt new wastewater guidelines to minimize environmental harm.
- **Expansion of river clean-Up efforts:** Scale up successful models like Ever Wave's AI-driven garbage collection to other regions facing similar waste challenges.
- **Support for upcycling and recycling initiatives:** Encourage partnerships between waste management organizations and fashion brands to convert waste into marketable products.
- **Community engagement and education:** Raise awareness about textile pollution's impacts and promote sustainable consumption practices.

Calls-to-action

For governments:

- Enforce stricter environmental regulations on textile manufacturers.
- Support infrastructure development for waste management and recycling.

For corporations:

- Adopt sustainable practices throughout supply chains.
- Collaborate with environmental organisations to reduce industrial waste.

For NGOs and environmental groups:

- Initiate community-driven programs for waste reduction.
- Provide education on pollution prevention and waste management.

For consumers:

- Choose sustainable fashion brands and reduce textile waste.
- Participate in community clean-up activities and advocate for eco-friendly practices.

About the Asian Dialogue Series

The “Asian Dialogues on Sustainability in the Textile and Garment Industry” series was initiated to foster collaboration and strengthen regional knowledge exchange for greater social, environmental and economic sustainability in the sector. Launched in 2015, the series aimed to cultivate regional, sector-specific dialogue and promote cooperation between actors from across the supply chain.

About Asia Garment Hub

The Asia Garment Hub is a digital one-stop shop tailored to the garment and textiles sector in Asia, viewed through a lens of Decent Work and Sustainability.

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The AGH Circle is a dedicated discussion forum - where you can network and engage with industry professionals in discussions on decent work and environmental sustainability for free.

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